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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000490

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DEPT FOR SA/FO AMBASSADOR QUINN, S/CT, SA/A, G KATE
FRIEDRICH, G/IWI CHARLOTTE PONTICELLI AND DIANNE GRAHAM
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76
TREASURY FOR LMCDONALD, WBALDRIDGE, APARAMESWARAN, ABAUKOL
STATE PLEASE PASS USAID
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: QANOONI DENIES INTEREST IN PRIME MINISTRY

REF: KABUL 467

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY. In a February 4 meeting with DCM and POLOFFs, Wolesi Jirga Speaker Yunus Qanooni denied interest in creating the post of Prime Minister. He reiterated his interest in a close relationship with President Karzai and the United States and stated that the Parliament had higher priorities than changing the constitutional structure of the government. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) After hearing rumors that Qanooni was among a group of MPs seeking to create a Prime Ministry (REFTEL), Ambassador instructed DCM and POLOFF to meet with Qanooni to express the USG's opposition to the idea. In response, Qanooni noted that when he was a member of the Cabinet he supported a parliamentary system of government, but he had to accept the decision of the majority and the Constitutional Loya Jirga to have a presidential system. He agreed that it was too soon to consider constitutional changes such as this, and stated that these rumors were not coming from his office. Instead, he believed that they were coming from officials in the Palace who were trying to hold Karzai hostage to tribal or personal interests - people who were unhappy with Qanooni's election as Speaker. He said that he was very satisfied with his job, and that if given the choice between being Prime Minister and Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga, he would choose his current position.

3. (C) Qanooni repeatedly commented that close cooperation between himself and President Karzai was important for both their and Afghanistan's success. He stated that he respects the President both because he was the rightfully elected President and because of his close relationship with the United States. He argued that his greatest challenge will be to save Parliament from tribal and religious extremism, and that his election as Speaker meant that MPs do not want an extremist Parliament but rather want new ideas.

4. (C) COMMENT. Qanooni did not appear surprised that this issue was raised and attempted to create an air of confidentiality and collegiality by sending his staff outside

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half way through the meeting. His claim of being very comfortable with his current position as Speaker appeared credible. It remains uncertain what motives lay behind the floating of the idea of a prime ministry, but Qanooni clearly understood the message of USG opposition to this idea. END COMMENT.
NEUMANN